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ABSTRACT

Using a counseling technique format of video and audio-taping, feedback, modeling, and role playing, the effects of taking an active counseling role by the counseling supervisor was shown to produce changes in counselor-trainee personality characteristics, as measured by the MMPI. Significant changes were noted in seven of the 15 variables, suggesting a similarity of the counselor training process to the counseling situation. It was shown that learning to be a counselor was, in itself, a counseling experience for counselor trainees. The data supported the hypothesis that measurable changes in personality characteristics can be obtained in a brief counselor training period by the training process itself. (Author)

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CHANGES IN PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS OF TRAINEES IN A COUNSELING METHODS COURSE

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CHANGES IN PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS OF TRAINEES

IN A COUNSELING METHODS COURSE

The training of counselors in basic skills of counseling has generally faced difficult problems in the selection of relevant criteria for evaluation. Counseling courses, per se, as basic to the counselor education program, have generally utilized counselor competency, perceived effectiveness, or some similar subjective judgement made by a counseling supervisor as evaluation criteria. Counseling, as a course of study, is at best, a very complex and illusive subject, demanding a reformulation of the theoretical implications and procedures for conveying skills unto the student. In this area counselor training has not been exceptionally efficient or economical of human resources (Ivey, Norrington, Miller, Morrill, & Haase, 1968).

Concepts such as accurate empathy, genuineness, and nonpossessive warmth as essential to the counseling relationship (Carkhuff, 1969) can be easily explained, discussed and dissected in a didactic classroom situation, but their acceptance and assimilation by the neophyte counselor into the counseling situation is a task requiring, at a minimum, a reexamination of the process of teaching someone "how to counsel".

Such a redefinition of counselor education is developed in the microcounseling approach to counseling techniques (Ivey, 1973; Ivey et al., 1968). Microcounseling would appear to provide a viable framework to make professional counselor training more meaningful and effective.

The authors would subscribe to the methods and techniques of

Ivey's model, both explicit and implicit, and offer certain additional formulations to a counselor education training model. Mainly, that the training of counselors is a process that is on-going, very similar to the process that the client himself encounters in a counseling situation. In interacting with fellow trainees, being examined as well as examining his own thoughts, feelings and motives, the whole personality structure of the trainee is, in effect, undergoing the same psychological dynamics as that of any client in a counseling relationship.

While Ivey's (1973) model focuses on the actions of the trainee, relegating to the supervisor-trainer the role of warm, empathetic support, our formulations provide for a very active role on the part of the supervisor as teacher-trainer and, most importantly, counselor to the counselor. It is felt that the supervisor should assume a role of counselor to the trainee, thus providing the same counseling experience to the counselor-trainees as they would seek to provide to their clients. The effectiveness of microcounseling has been amply documented (Aldridge, 1971; Gluckstern, 1972; Ivey, 1973) and, within the framework of the 12 specific skills of microcounseling (Ivey, 1971), would provide an effective complement to the counselor training process.

It was proposed that the counselor education process is a psychological experience similar to the counseling process and certain changes, measurable psychometrically, would occur in a counseling techniques class that utilized basically the format of microcounseling with active counseling of the counselor-trainees as part of the coursework.

The following hypotheses were investigated: (a) personality changes would occur during the four-month period of the course as a result of the experience of counseling and being counseled, and

(b) the changes that did occur would be in a favorable direction as predicted by previous Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) studies of counselor characteristics (Heikkinen & Wegner, 1973).

Previous MMPI studies have compared experienced counselors to inexperienced preprofessional students (Cottle & Lewis, 1954) or have compared effective counselors-in-training to ineffective counselors-in-training on the basis of some operational definition of effectiveness such as practicum grades (Johnson, Shertzer, Linden & Stone, 1967) or ratings by supervisors and peers (Arbuckle, 1956; Wasson, 1965). This study sought to measure change in personality variables over time for all Ss, as each were starting basically at the same point in their exposure to the counseling experience, thus, avoiding certain criticisms of past MMPI studies of counselors as discussed in Heikkinen and Wegner (1973).

Further, it was predicted that during the counseling course as the Ss became more aware of their own feelings and motivations, more attuned to their own psychological characteristics, as well as those characteristics of their clients and peers, and as the dynamics of both the group and individual experience evolved, the following changes in personality characteristics, as measured by the MMPI, would be demonstrated: (a) the validity scales L (Lie), F (Response conformity), and K (Defensiveness) would decrease; (b) clinical scales such as the Hs, Hy, D, Pd, Sc, Pt, Pa, Ma, and Si would decrease. This decrease from pre- to posttest would reflect a favorable positive direction that personality characteristics would change as a function of the counselor training; and (c) the facilitative experience would cause increases in the research scales of Cn (Control), Do (Dominance), and Es (Ego Strength).

A recent study by Jansen, Robb and Bonk (1972) suggested the similarity in peer rankings of counselor competency (skill) and likeability

(interpersonal attractiveness) among counselors-in-training. The possible correlates and their relation to the MMPI variables was also investigated in this study.

Method

The subjects were 16 graduate students (9 females and 7 males) who were enrolled in a counseling techniques course at Bucknell University which led to a master's degree in school psychology. The Ss had a mean age of 28.0 with a range of ages from 22 to 53. The course included didactic instruction, audio and video taping of clients (both individual and group), supervisor and peer evaluation of tapes, availability of personality test information, and counseling of the trainees both individually and in groups.

All Ss were given the MMPI at the beginning of the course (Pretest condition) and four months later at the end of the course (Posttest condition). In addition, a course evaluation questionnaire was given to all Ss at the conclusion of the course. Contained in the questionnaire were course evaluation questions as well as peer ranking scales. Each S was asked to rank order their peers on two independent scales of counseling competency and general likeability. Two counseling supervisors who functioned both as teachers, evaluators, and counselors rated all Ss on the basis of counseling competency using a Likert-type rating (Product moment inter-rater reliability correlation r=+.86).

The mean peer ranking for each S was computed for counseling competency and general likeablility. Data were obtained on pre- and posttest periods using the validity, clinical, and the Do, Cn, and Es research scales. Student's t test of dependent means (two-tailed) was used to compare test scores at the beginning of the course to test scores at the end of

the course.

Results

Means, standard deviations and t tests for the comparison of pre- to posttest MMPI variable scores are given in Table 1. The sign of the t value indicates the direction of the change, that is, whether an increase or decrease in the variable over the counselor training period.

Insert Table 1 about here

Statistically significant changes were found in F, Hs, D, Hy, Pa, Sc, and Es. All trends were in the expected (favorable) direction except Si and K which were minimal. Table 1 provides support for the hypotheses under investigation.

Correlations between supervisor evaluation and mean peer rankings of counseling competency (skill), likeability, and increases in ego strength (Es) and social introversion (Si) are presented in Table 2. Significant correlations were obtained confirming the relationship between these variables.

Insert Table 2 about here

It was also shown that supervisor evaluation was more closely related to peer ratings of counselor competency ($r=+.78$) than to peer ratings of likeability ($r=+.74$). Peer evaluation correlated to supervisor evaluation $r=+.78$ ($p<.001$). As shown in Table 2 evaluation by either peer or supervisor is very closely associated with the dimension of likeability.

Positive evaluation was shown to be significantly related to social extroversion (low Si) and ego strength (high Es). The dimension of likeability correlated negatively with decreases in Pa, (r= -.59, p<.05) and Sc, (r= -.49, p<.05).

End of course questionnaires yielded the following information: (a) Age was shown not to correlate significantly with any evaluation variable, and in relation to the MMPI variables, age correlated only with Si (r= -.58, p<.05); (b) Most Ss felt that being counseled was helpful in understanding themselves and felt that it was an asset to their counseling skills; and (c) Twelve of the 16 Ss felt that they significantly learned about themselves as a person during the experience in the course, while the others generally expressed that they would have liked to do more in this area,thinking it to be an asset to their counseling skills. Learning about yourself, as a variable, was significantly related to Ma (r= -.68, p<.01) and Pt (r= -.62, p<.01).

Discussion

The results of this experiment demonstrate that significant changes in personality characteristics can be effected during counselor training. That is, teaching students to counsel appears to be inextricably tied to the psychological dynamics of the counseling experience. The comparison of pretest to posttest MMPI variables over a four month period suggests not only that measurable changes can occur but also that the changes are in a positive, favorable direction.

As for the validity scales, the L scale, suggesting the Ss became more honest and less inconsistent with themselves, measurably decreased, the F scale decreased significantly. While it was predicted that Ss would decrease in defensiveness (K), the trend was not demonstrated, which is consistent with Cottle and Lewis's (1954) finding

that counselors tend to be more defensive.

On all but one of the clinical scales changes occurred in the predicted direction. Subjects became significantly less depressed (D); significant decreases in tendency to turn anxiety inward (Hy); significantly less bodily complaints (Hs); they became significantly less paranoid and more trustful; and significantly lower in tendency to daydream or be verbally angular (Sc). Other trends in the clinical scales emphasize support for the hypotheses that the changes were all in a favorable, positive, and facilitating direction. Subjects did become more introverted (low Si) which was counter to the predicted trend. While this change was minimal, it was consistent with Lewis and Cottle's (1954) finding.

The experimental scales present somewhat of a question because relatively little comparable research with counselors has been done. Dominance (Do) and control (Cn) were found to increase as predicted but not significantly. Ego strength (Es), as expected, was found to significantly increase, perhaps related to the feelings of self-confidence and capability that practice and familiarity with the counseling situation provided. These characteristics have been demonstrated for counselors in previous studies (Hiekkinen & Wegner, 1972).

The personality changes paralleled changes that would facilitate any counseling relationship, thus emphasizing the psychological experience of counselor training.

The results of the mean peer rankings of counselor competency and likeability support the findings of the Jansen, Robb, and Bonk (1972) study that practicum students were unable to differentiate in their rankings of peers on competency and likeability. While these two dimensions

may be very similar, as shown by the correlations, it must also be kept in mind that the dimension of likeability is closely associated to supervisor evaluation and peer evaluation. Interpersonal attractiveness, then, has implications as an element of concern to counselor educators, with particular import for the selection and screening process.

Clearly, it can be seen that learning how to be a counselor is, in itself, a counseling experience for the counselor trainee and that certain measurable and positive changes in personality characteristics are realized. The counselor educator, by assuming an active role as both teacher and counselor to the trainee, can contribute to the effectiveness of the counselor training. As no controls were used in the design, the results are not conclusive and future research directed at the areas reflected in this study would serve to clarify the dynamic aspects of the counselor training process. Closer study of the variables involved, as well as emphasis on the differential changes in relation to effectiveness would more completely delineate the counselor training experience.

In conclusion, using a counseling techniques format very similar to microcounseling, favorable changes in the personality characteristics of counselor trainees were obtained. The implications of this approach to the counselor education process are apparent.

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Table 1

Comparison of Mean MMPI Scores for Pre- and Posttest Conditions

Variable	Pretest		Posttest		t^a
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
1. L (Lie)	3.35	2.90	3.06	2.69	+1.03
2. F (Response Conformity)	4.29	3.85	3.63	2.96	+2.44**
3. K (Defensiveness)	15.06	4.72	15.56	5.07	-1.25
4. Hs (Hypochondriasis)	5.59	4.16	3.31	3.14	+3.29***
5. D (Depression)	20.00	6.04	18.44	2.87	+2.29**
6. Hy (Hysteria)	22.76	5.23	20.19	5.61	+2.86**
7. Pd (Psychopathic Deviance)	16.53	4.98	15.56	4.03	+1.33
8. Pa (Paranoia)	10.76	2.36	9.50	2.03	+2.10*
9. Pt (Psychasthenia)	12.41	8.31	11.88	7.33	+1.32
10. Sc (Schizophrenia)	11.29	6.37	10.31	6.06	+1.80*
11. Ma (Mania)	17.88	3.97	17.81	3.89	+ .17
12. Si (Social Introversion)	26.71	11.12	28.00	11.96	- .47
13. Do (Dominance)	18.31	3.32	19.06	2.52	-1.48
14. Cn (Control)	27.06	3.92	27.94	4.07	- .88
15. Es (Ego Strength)	47.29	5.34	49.50	5.15	-2.76**

[a] Negative t-tests refer to an increase from pre- to posttest and positive t's refer to a decrease from pre- to posttest.

*$p < .10$

**$p < .05$

***$p < .01$

Table 2

Correlations between Supervisor Evaluation and Mean Peer Rankings of Counseling Competency (skill), Likeability, and Increase in MMPI Ego Strength (Es) and Social Introversion (Si)

	Counselor Competency	Likeability	Supervisor Evaluation
Likeability	+.81***		
Supervisor Evaluation (Proficiency in course)	+.78***	+.74***	
Es (Ego Strength)	+.54*	+.65**	+.53*
Si (Social Introversion)	+.10	+.17	-.56*

*$p < .05$

**$p < .01$

***$p < .001$